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THE BAGDAD RAILWAY

BY H. CHARLES WOODS, F.R.G.S.

THE importance of the Bagdad Railway is due to the fact that it constitutes the backbone of Ottoman power and utility in the War. This is the case for two distinct reasons. Firstly, whilst the adhesion of Turkey to the enemy cause would in any case have been a considerable augmentation of the forces of the Central Powers, had it not been for the existence of this line, these forces, together with the officers and instructors furnished by Germany, could not have been dispatched to and employed in areas where their presence was and is much more useful than had it even been possible to bring them to the French, Italian or Russian fronts. Thus were it not for this means of communication, Ottoman resistance in Mesopotamia and in Syria could have been discounted as a practical consideration in the War, and the sending of Turkish troops and reinforcements to North-eastern Asia Minor would have been a much more lengthy and difficult operation than in fact has been the case.

The second direction in which the railways of Asiatic Turkey have significance, not only in the present War, but also in the numerous Turkish campaigns which preceded it, depends upon the opportunities which they give for the maintenance of Ottoman authority in the interior and especially for the enforcement of military service upon the population. The opening up of the country during recent years has enabled the Government to quell more than one insurrection in distant parts of the empire. This facility has been particularly valuable in the case of the Hedjaz, where there have been several rebellions. Moreover, the existence of railways renders possible a comparatively rapid mobilization of at least parts of Turkey's fighting strength. But this in its turn has rather a curious effect, for it means that military

service is not only much more strictly enforced among the sections of the population domiciled near to railways, but that the reserves furnished from these districts are often called out long before much younger men, recruited from more remote districts have performed their military obligations.

In order to explain the war importance of the Bagdad Railway I shall describe as accurately as is possible the progress made by that line. Starting from Haidar Pasha, opposite to Constantinople, it is now possible to travel by train or by water across the greater part of the areas which lie between the Ottoman capital and Bagdad on the one hand and the Egyptian frontier on the other. The Taurus tunnels where there was previously a gap of about thirty miles, were pierced in November, 1916, and they are now open to traffic, which for some months was maintained and which is still probably being maintained by a narrow-gauge railway. More or less through communication has therefore been established right across the Anatolian Plateau, along the Plain of Cilicia, and through the Amanus Range, where the great Bagche tunnel was only completed in the late summer of 1915, to a junction about ten miles to the north of Aleppo. From here the northern prong, or Bagdad Railway proper, continues its way in an easterly direction, crossing the Euphrates at Jerablus, where the permanent bridge was only finished in 1915, as far as Héliif and probably to Nesibin. At the other or Bagdad end, the railway has been completed in a northerly direction up to Samarra. If we take it that the respective termini are at Héliif and at Samarra, this means that out of the total distance of approximately fifteen hundred miles from Constantinople to Bagdad, about twelve hundred miles can be accomplished by train.

So far as the Mesopotamia Campaign be concerned the advantages accruing to Turkey and to Germany from the Bagdad Railway are so obvious as to require practically no comment here. To summarize these advantages, they mean that had it not been for the existence of that line, that campaign would probably never have taken place at all, or at any rate that its importance would have been so small as to place it in a category of third-rate significance. On the one hand this is the case because, without railway communications, the Turks would have had enough to do to defend their north-eastern frontier against a Russian advance and because there-

fore they would have had no forces available with which to threaten the British positions on the Persian Gulf and in Persia—positions for the safeguarding of which we were compelled to undertake these costly and difficult operations. And, on the other hand, it must have been at least in part the existence of the Bagdad Railway and especially its ever continuing improvements, to which I have already alluded, that influenced those responsible for originally pushing forward in Mesopotamia for a distance and in a manner otherwise entirely unjustified considering the forces available, the inadequate preparations, and the difficulty of the country. Thus, the necessity for forestalling the Turks before they could effectively improve the Bagdad line was undoubtedly a good reason for the sending of a Mesopotamia expedition directly after the entry of Turkey into the War and at a moment when the presence of every available British soldier was of the utmost value elsewhere. Moreover, had the Ottoman Government been left a free hand and had the finished parts of the line therefore been available for the transportation of railway material instead of being required for the conveyance of Turkish troops to the East, there can be no doubt that much further progress could have been made both on the main route and with its several branches, and that as a consequence the situation in the East would be even more serious than it is to-day.

Though this is not perhaps so apparent at first sight, the railway, together with the branch from Eskişehir to Angora, is also responsible for providing a quicker and easier means of communication between Constantinople and Eastern Asia Minor than would otherwise have existed so long as the Black Sea was closed to Turkish traffic by a Russian fleet. Thus the distances to be covered by road between Héliopolis or Nisibin and the areas of the former Turco-Russian Campaign are much less than those which would otherwise have had to be traversed from Constantinople or even from Angora. Moreover, even with the Black Sea route open, as it is to-day, and even with the enemy in possession of the Caucasian railways formerly belonging to Russia, it is highly probable that quicker transit between the Bosphorus and such places as Mush, Bitlis and Van could be effected by means of the Bagdad Railway than by way of the southern or eastern ports of the Black Sea.

Ignoring for the moment the all important Syrian rail-

ways, which will be considered later, there is another branch which has played its part in the War. I refer to the line from Afiun-Karahissar to Smyrna, together with its feeder running to Panderma on the southern shore of the Sea of Marmora. These lines, which prior to the War were worked by a French company under a special arrangement with the Government, but which have since been taken over by the Turks, were possessed of considerable significance during the Dardanelles campaign, for it was partly on account of their existence that troops were able to be conveyed to districts which lie in the immediate vicinity of the Asiatic coast of the Straits. Thus, as communication by way of the Sea of Marmora was rendered insecure by the presence of British submarines, and as the road across the Isthmus of Bulair could be commanded and therefore rendered to a great extent useless from the sea, there seems no doubt that the enemy brought up many of his reinforcements by that route, which left them to face the dangers of a sea passage far shorter in length than that which had to be risked from Constantinople.

So much for the military importance of the Bagdad Railway itself. Turning to the Syrian railways, which, geographically speaking, form a sort of southern prong of the Bagdad line, but which are not politically part of it, I will discuss these lines in their relation to the German system. As far as Aleppo, about eight hundred and forty miles from Constantinople, the Anatolian and Bagdad railways serve as a means of communication with the south as well as with the east. From Aleppo the southern prong, before the War owned partly by French companies and partly by the Turks themselves, runs by way of Rayak, where there is a break of gauge, and of Damascus to Deraia. From this point there are two routes. The first is by the Hedjaz line, which continues its way in a southerly direction as far as Medina. The second bends from Deraia in a westerly direction towards Haifa, but before reaching that port turns south near Nazareth, ultimately extending as far as Bir Auja, about thirty-five miles to the southwest of Beersheba. The last section of this line, namely, that to the south of Nazareth, was built by the Turks and Germans after the outbreak of the War.

The above details are sufficient to prove that the Syrian lines have been and are possessed of a war importance almost equal to that of the Bagdad Railway. Had it not been for their existence the danger of threatened attacks upon Egypt

during the earlier stages of the present conflagration could have been practically ignored. Equally well, or still more, it was largely the completion of the new line on the west of the Jordan which enabled the Turks to bring up the reinforcements with which they so determinedly resisted the British advance upon Jerusalem. As in the case of the Bagdad Railway, too, our plan of campaign for the defence of Egypt must have been influenced by the knowledge of the existence of these lines and of their ever increasing prolongation. Thus, had we waited to establish a line of adequate defences in an area situated at a safe distance to the east of the canal, until the opening of the Taurus and Amanus tunnels and until the completion of the new railway on the west of the Jordan, it is obvious that the magnitude of our task and the dangers of the situation would have been enormously increased.

The historical development of the Bagdad Railway scheme should be considered as having taken place in two phases—the first lasting until the year 1888, and the second extending from that time until the present date, and therefore covering the period during which the Germans were carefully preparing to meet the conditions likely to arise in case of a European war.

The present Bagdad line is by no means the first that has been under consideration. The idea of connecting the Mediterranean with the Persian Gulf by an overland route, and therefore of shortening the journey round the Cape or across the Isthmus of Suez, was first suggested about the year 1835. Under discussion for many years, the original plan—a plan largely based upon the detailed survey made by Colonel Chesney in 1835-1837—was to avoid Asia Minor altogether, and to start the proposed railway not from the Bosphorus but from some point on the Eastern Mediterranean. Negotiations and pourparlers on the merits of the various lines were in progress for many years, a company being formed for the purpose of realizing Colonel Chesney's plan in the early fifties. This company being unable to raise the necessary funds, and the British Government having refused its support to the scheme in 1857, the question lapsed until 1872, when it was referred to a Parliamentary Commission, which approved of the construction of a line by the route advocated by Colonel Chesney. Subsequently, however, the idea was dropped in favor of one by which early in 1876 England pur-

chased shares to the value of £4,000,000 in the Suez Canal, which had been open to traffic since 1869.

From this time onwards two reasons gradually led up to the idea of connecting not the Mediterranean but the Bosphorus with the Persian Gulf. The first of these was that, whilst in earlier times there was no railway nearer than Brindisi on the overland route to India, from the opening of the through line to Constantinople in 1888, it was natural, if there was to be an overland route to the Persian Gulf at all, that such a route should follow a line which would necessitate the shortest sea passage. The other and from political and military points of view far more important reason for the change of plan was that German influence, gradually developed in Turkey since the accession of the present Emperor to the throne, has been entirely directed towards the construction of railways which would not be easy of attack and communications which could not be cut by a group of Powers with the command of the sea.

Up to the year 1888, when the second phase began, the only railways existing in Asia Minor were the Smyrna-Aidin, the Smyrna-Kassaba, the Mersina-Adana, and the Haidar Pasha (Scutari)-Ismid lines. All these railways were completely, or at least practically, in the hands of English capitalists. The Scutari-Ismid line, which now constitutes the first section of the Anatolian and therefore of the Bagdad Railway, having been built by the Turks, was leased to a British company in 1880 for a period of twenty years. In 1888, however, the Turks, influenced by the Germans, dispossessed the British company and handed the line over to a German syndicate financed by the Deutsche Bank of Berlin, which then became the moving spirit in all the schemes of Germanic railway construction in the Asiatic dominions of the Sultan. Moreover, the Germans secured two Imperial Iradés, the one giving them the control of this line for a period of ninety-nine years, and the other granting them the right of extending it by way of Eskishehr to Angora, and therefore for a further three hundred miles.

It is unnecessary here to go into the details of the various concessions as a result of which the line has been prolonged from Eskishehr to its present terminus. It is sufficient to say that in 1893 the Germans were granted the right of building a railway to Konia, and that from the time of its completion, three years later, the plan for the prolongation of that line

to the Persian Gulf became more definite and precise. The Kaiser, who had paid his first visit to Constantinople in 1889—a visit more or less connected with the then recent grabbing of the Haidar Pasha-Ismid Railway by the Germans and with its prolongation to Angora, to which I have already referred—went to Turkey again in the year 1898. It was this, his second visit, and the appointment of Baron Marshal von Bieberstein as German Ambassador in Constantinople in 1897, that led to the promise of a concession for the present railway—a promise which I believe was made verbally in 1898.

That promise was followed by a preliminary Convention signed between Doctor Siemens—then Director of the Deutsche Bank—and the Porte. That Convention gave to the Anatolian Railway Company, in principle, the right of constructing a line from Konia to the Persian Gulf. In 1902 a formal Convention was approved by the Sultan—a Convention which in its turn served as the basis of the final agreement of March 5, 1903. This agreement, which constitutes the real charter of the Bagdad Railway, was actually signed between representatives of the Ottoman Government on the one hand and those of the Anatolian Railway Company on the other. But as the Anatolian Railway Company was so blatantly German, and as the Deutsche Bank, at that time, wished to cater for international financial support, it was carefully arranged before the signature of the Convention that a new company to be known as the “Imperial Ottoman Bagdad Railway Company,” should take over the concession actually given to men who acted as nominees of the Deutsche Bank and of the Anatolian Company when they signed the agreement. The new company, with a capital of £600,000, was formed on the very day on which the concession was signed.

Between 1903 and the outbreak of the War, whilst various supplementary agreements were made, the most important was that concluded in 1911 concerning the Port of Alexandretta and the last section of railway—namely, that to the south of Bagdad. With regard to the first of these questions the great significance of the arrangements, made in connection with Alexandretta, is due to the fact that they finally disposed of the idea of a modification in the original route—a widely discussed modification which would have taken the main line by way of Alexandretta to Aleppo instead of

by the present more northerly route via Bagche. The fact that this modification was not accepted, and that the line now follows approximately the route originally defined by the concession, means that in place of running absolutely along the seacoast for a good many miles, the railway now approaches the coast nowhere within a distance of less than ten miles. Under German influence the Turks thereby avoided what would have been a continual menace to their communications from the sea; for, whilst the section of the railway in the neighborhood of the Gulf of Alexandretta is still the one most easy of attack, that attack would now constitute a far larger undertaking than were the line to have run close to the water's edge. This in itself is sufficient to prove that the Germans having determined to connect the Bosphorus with the Persian Gulf, never lost sight of the question of counteracting the value of sea-power, and that they constructed their line for military and not for commercial purposes.

Politically and commercially, the right given to the company to construct the branch to and the port at Alexandretta went far beyond anything foreseen in the original concession. The Turks were already committed by that arrangement not to grant concessions for railways running to the coast between Mersina and Tripoli to any group except the Bagdad company. But this did not anticipate the giving to it rights to be enjoyed for a period of ninety-nine years from the time of the completion of the railway to H  lif, rights which really amounted to a lease, and facilities which might almost be compared to those formally enjoyed by the Germans at Kiao-Chao. The concessionaires obtained the power to build quays, docks, and warehouses, and to police a port which, unlike Haidar Pasha within closed Turkish waters, is situated in an area over which the Turks could have no direct control so long as they did not possess the command of the sea. Commercially speaking, too, the acquisition of such a prize was of supreme value to Germany, for the possession of Alexandretta once and for all removed any danger of competition for the Bagdad Railway.

Over and above the arrangements made in regard to Alexandretta (conventions 2 and 3), we have in the 1911 arrangements, firstly, the financial provision for the building of the line from H  lif to Bagdad, and, secondly, some sort of German undertaking in regard to the ownership and control of the section to be built from Bagdad to the Persian

Gulf. Whilst no detailed official statement has, so far as I know, been published upon the last-mentioned question, it was common knowledge, knowledge now confirmed in the disclosures of Prince Lichnowsky, that in 1911 the company renounced its right to the construction of the section from Bagdad to the Gulf in exchange for the Alexandretta concession. This arrangement followed almost immediately the meeting of the ex-Tsar with the Emperor at Potsdam in November, 1910, a meeting during which the relations existing between Russia and Germany were temporarily adjusted. Though the exact nature of that arrangement was not known until afterwards, it is now certain that Russia agreed no longer to oppose the construction of the Bagdad Railway, and either herself to build or allow the Germans to build a line from Khanikin—the terminus of a branch already agreed upon between Turkey and the Bagdad Company—to Teheran. As compensation for this, the Russian position in Northern Persia was recognized by Germany. It remained then for Berlin to treat with England and France for agreements concerning future developments in their respective spheres. The Tripoli War of 1911 and the Balkan War of 1912 were not, however, favorable periods for negotiation, and it was thus only in 1913 that Turkey, in agreement with Germany, despatched to London the ex-Grand Vizier—Hakki Pasha—to try to bring about agreements to be drawn up between the Foreign Office, the German Embassy, and the Ottoman Embassy—agreements to settle the outstanding differences as regards the Bagdad-Persian Gulf section and other cognate matters of river transport in these regions. These agreements obviously presupposed a continuance of friendly and peaceful relations between Turkey, Germany and Great Britain and, as Prince Lichnowsky tells us, they were practically already concluded when in August, 1914, Great Britain found herself compelled to declare war on Germany, Turkey subsequently throwing in her lot with the enemy. That this was the state of things on the very eve of the War clearly proves the absolute falseness of all such statements as those sometimes made, to the effect that Russia and France have consistently co-operated with England in preventing the completion of the Bagdad Railway.

The present is a moment at which it is difficult, if not undesirable, to make a detailed forecast as to the future of the Bagdad Railway, and of the other lines in Asiatic Turkey.

The only alternative is, therefore, to say that two things seem certain—firstly, that sooner or later the Bagdad or some other line from the Bosphorus to the Persian Gulf will be completed; and secondly, that its ownership and control must depend not so much upon any agreements already made as upon the results of the War and particularly upon the fate of Turkey. In regard to this latter, the Allies must leave no stone unturned to prevent the conclusion of a peace which would leave the enemy still possessed of the predominating control in an undertaking which, once it is robbed of its political significance, can easily be established upon an international basis and controlled as a result of the adoption of some scheme of internationalization. That scheme must depend upon the future status of the now Asiatic dominions of the Sultan. If there are to be spheres of influence or protection, then the main lines and their branches in these various spheres will pass under the control of the Power or Powers responsible for that protection. That control will have to be extended in such a way that the susceptibilities of the races which make up the population shall not be offended. If, on the other hand, Asiatic Turkey be not divided into such spheres, or if only part of it be so divided, then, as I do not believe that the Turks can manage their railways without foreign assistance, some scheme of internationalization will have to be devised for the railways in the areas still left under the direct rule of the Sultan. Whether that scheme should give to each country or to each group of countries the lines in a particular district—a plan at one time suggested for the Bagdad Railway—or whether the railways in question should be internationalized as a whole, are questions which cannot be decided until the advent of peace.

H. CHARLES WOODS.